The Jesuit tradition values quality education for all — DACA students included

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As the education deans of the nation’s Jesuit colleges and universities, we are compelled to join our university presidents and others who have raised their collective voices to support our students in the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program. Through our work, we prepare the teachers, principals, and educational support providers for our nation’s youths. The Jesuit educational tradition values the right of all people to a meaningful and quality education, which is transformative for both learner and community.

Our DACA students are no exception. Through no fault of their own, they came to the United States in search of opportunities. They have been documented and thoroughly vetted, are among our most successful students, and are preparing for positions of leadership and service in various industries in the United States. Deporting these young people just as they are poised to make strong contributions to this country — after investing so much to educate them in our public schools — is a public policy and not in the interest of our institutions.

The story of Yuliya and her sister Fatima, young students in Los Angeles schools and daughters of Romulo Amezcua-Domíquez, helps to put human faces on these dire consequences. Immediately after Romulo, an undocumented immigrant, dropped off Yuliya at school last February, he was arrested by Immigration and Customs Enforcement officials as Fatima caught the arsonist on camera. This parent’s arrest at the schoolhouse door for being undocumented had a chilling ripple effect on the whole school community, even prompting the school to tell students whose parents are in the United States Regularly to develop family plans for what to do if a parent is detained or deported. No child should have to bear this burden. Under these conditions, it is near impossible for students to learn and for teachers to teach. When loved ones feel unsafe under the threat of deportation, the teaching and learning of all of the children in P-12 schools suffer tremendously. For those of us in education, that is the most significant unintended consequence of this misguided policy.

Ending the DACA program would have a ripple effect in other ways. Approximately 850,000 people have enrolled in the DACA program since its inception in 2012, joining the workforce and reducing the number of unauthorized immigrant households living in poverty. Of these individuals, 350,000 have enrolled in a college or university since 2014. Most of the DACA-eligible students rely on their DACA-provided work permits to pay for the costs of education. Working to pay for school is a time-honored American tradition — with the loss of that permit, these young people may not be able to pay their own way. Finish college and give back to the country that supported them. Who will bear the educational costs of a quarter million young people who no longer are able to work?

In addition, it is estimated that the end of DACA could mean that the United States would lose 20,000 K-12 teachers, many of whom are bilingual. Losing such a large number of teachers during a time of teacher shortages would have a negative impact on our public schools. While there are a range of views on DACA as a public policy, the reality is that we are too far down the road to end a program that allows so many people to help advance our nation's promise.

DACA students contribute greatly to the common good of American societies. The United States of America is its home. They participated in the DACA program in good faith and have much to offer this country through their hard work and talent. We cannot betray them by ending the program and sending them to countries they do not even know. As noted above, deporting DACA students or their undocumented family members will have repercussions beyond the individuals and families involved; such actions disrupt the education of entire communities.

As a society, we cannot afford the unintended educational consequences such policy actions would have. We urge our leaders to find a permanent solution for the DACA program for the benefit of our youth and our country.